United Nations E/CN.3/2012/31

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
5 December 2011

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Forty-third session
28 February-2 March 2012
Item 4 (l) of the provisional agenda*
Items for information: global geospatial information management

Global geospatial information management

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its forty-first session (see E/2010/24, chap. I.B, decision 41/110), the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit his report on global geospatial information management, which provides an update on recent activities in this field. The report discusses, in particular, the establishment in July 2011 of a new subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, namely, the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management. The findings of the inaugural session of the United Nations Committee of Experts and of the first United Nations High-level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management, held in Seoul in October 2011, are presented. The report also describes planned activities for 2012, in particular the second session of the Committee of Experts, to be held in New York in August 2012.

The Commission is invited to take note of the present report.

* E/CN.3/2012/1.

11-62229 (E) 301211

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-first session in 2010 (see E/2010/24, chap. I.B, decision 41/110), the Statistical Commission recognized the importance of the integration of geospatial[1] and statistical information and requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report outlining a global vision for geospatial information management to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council, reviewing the existing mechanisms and exploring the possibility of creating a global forum. In addition, the Commission requested the Statistics Division to convene a meeting of an international expert group, consisting of statisticians and geospatial information specialists, to address global geospatial information management issues. At its forty-second session in 2011, the Commission received an update (E/CN.3/2011/34) on how the Division had implemented the above mandate of the Commission by organizing preparatory expert group meetings and by working towards a comprehensive report for submission to the Council. The present report covers activities since February 2011.

II. The formal establishment of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

2. Following the request made by the Statistical Commission, a comprehensive report of the Secretary-General on global geospatial information management (E/2011/89) was prepared and presented to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 2011. This report had benefited from wide-ranging consultations with Member States and relevant stakeholders. Consequently, the Council recognized the need to promote international cooperation in the field of global geospatial information and decided to formally establish the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management (see Council decision 2011/24, as contained in the annex to the present report). The Committee of Experts, an intergovernmental body, is bringing together, for the first time at the global level, Government experts from all Member States to hold consultations on the rapidly changing field of geospatial information, to hold regular high-level and multi-stakeholder discussions on global geospatial information, and to promote national, regional and global efforts towards fostering the exchange of knowledge and expertise and assisting developing countries in building and strengthening their national capacities in the field. The substantive recommendation of the Commission was instrumental in the establishment of this new subsidiary body of the Council and is explicitly acknowledged in the Council decision.

3. The United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management held its inaugural session in Seoul on 26 October 2011. The session was attended by representatives of almost 90 countries as well as by international professional organizations in their capacity as observers. During the substantive work of the session, participants discussed the possible contribution of this professional community to the forthcoming United Nations Conference on

[1] Economic and Social Council decision 2011/24 refers to "geographic information". However, during the consultation process with Member States, the experts recommended the use of the term "geospatial information" instead of "geographic information" because the former is more comprehensive and more commonly used at present.

Sustainable Development, to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, and decided to establish a task force to prepare a report for the summit. The Committee also established a working group to prepare an inventory of major issues to be addressed by the Committee and to develop a programme of work outlining actions to be implemented during the next five years. In addition, the Committee established a group with a mandate to develop strategic considerations of technological and substantive advances in geospatial and interrelated information infrastructure. The Committee decided to hold its second session in New York, from 13 to 15 August 2012.[2]

III. Activities in the field of global geospatial information management

4. While the main efforts of the Statistics Division during the reporting period were concentrated on the formal establishment of the Committee of Experts, the Division carried out a number of global geospatial information management-related activities, which are briefly described below.

A. Third preparatory meeting on global geospatial information management

5. The Statistics Division in cooperation with the Cartographic Section of the Department of Field Support, organized the third preparatory meeting on global geospatial information management in New York from 4 to 6 April 2011.[3] Sixty experts from 20 countries, 6 United Nations entities and 11 regional and international professional organizations attended the meeting. Participants at the meeting reviewed and finalized the report on global geospatial information management to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council (E/2011/89) and discussed the preparations for the global geospatial information management-related events to be held in Seoul in October 2011.

B. United Nations High-level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management

6. The inaugural session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management was preceded by the first United Nations High-level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management, which was co-organized by the United Nations and the Government of the Republic of Korea, represented by the National Geographical Information Institute. It was attended by 350 participants from 87 countries, including representatives of 12 international organizations, 15 private companies and 12 United Nations organizations. The High-

[2] The documents and report of the Committee of Experts can be consulted at its website (http://ggim.un.org/ggim_committee.html).

[3] The first preparatory meeting on global geospatial information management was held in Bangkok on 25 October 2009, one day prior to the eighteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific, and the second preparatory meeting was held in New York on 10 and 11 May 2010.

level Forum was jointly opened by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea and the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. During the initial ministerial segment, attended by eight ministers representing all regions of the world, ministers unanimously voiced their support for the initiative of the United Nations to foster geospatial information management among Member States, international organizations and the private sector. The Forum concluded with a summary provided by the Chair and the adoption of the Seoul Declaration on Global Geospatial Information Management.[4] In particular, participants recommended that actions be taken to foster and strengthen national, regional and global cooperation with the aim of developing an interconnected global community of practice on geospatial information under the auspices of the United Nations. They also stressed the importance of the establishment of effective processes for jointly and collaboratively promoting common frameworks and standards as well as harmonized definitions and methods, and recognized the importance of sharing experiences in policymaking, supporting legislation and funding strategies, as well as facilitating and promoting capacity development in developing countries. The Government of Qatar generously offered to convene the second High-level Forum in Doha in 2013.

7. On the day before the first High-level Forum, 29 business leaders and heads of national mapping agencies from 30 Member States participated in a special side event. They recognized the importance of coordination, cooperation and partnerships among a wide variety of multidisciplinary stakeholders in the public and private sectors underpinning the building of a national spatial data infrastructure, and acknowledged the role of public-private partnership in geospatial information production, dissemination and use.

C. Thematic seminar on the integration of statistical and geospatial information

8. A thematic seminar on the issues and challenges of integrating statistical and geospatial information was held in Seoul on 27 October 2011, immediately following the meeting of the Committee of Experts. This seminar was co-organized by the Statistics Division, Statistics Korea, the United States Bureau of the Census and Eurostat. It focused on the importance of geography to statistical information and the use of geospatial tools in support of statistical activities. Three major topics were considered: collecting and handling geospatial and statistical data; integrating statistical and geospatial data; and using integrated or combined geospatial and statistical data. It was recognized that the integration of these types of data with additional thematic data from other sources is beneficial for analysis and evidence-based decision-making.

D. Second Administrative-level Boundaries project

9. The Second Administrative-level Boundaries project was launched in 2001 in the context of the United Nations Geographic Information Working Group and developed under the leadership of the World Health Organization. A country-

[4] Available from http://ggim.un.org/forum1.html.

oriented initiative, it aims to provide countries and the international community at large with a working platform for the collection, management, analysis, visualization and sharing of subnational data down to the second subnational level. This information is crucial for many applications (including humanitarian assistance, disaster management, peace and security, censuses and statistical analysis, environment, health and education and poverty mapping). On 1 January 2011, the Statistics Division and the Cartographic Section joined forces to continue this initiative. Coordination and policy issues are managed by the Statistics Division and the Cartographic Section is responsible for technical aspects. Through this joint effort, the Second Administrative-level Boundaries project will be further developed and fully integrated within the framework of the United Nations Initiative on Global Geospatial Information Management.

E. Global geospatial information management website

10. The Statistics Division is regularly updating its website dedicated to global geospatial information management.[5] The website contains background information on the mandate of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, on global geospatial information management activities and related initiatives, events and partners. Furthermore, the site also provides information and news about major events organized by the Division and others related to geographic information systems, cartography and standardization of geographical names.

IV. Future activities

A. Establishment of working groups

11. In accordance with the recommendation made by the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management at its inaugural session, the Statistics Division has initiated the establishment of a task force to prepare a contribution for the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. It has also established a working group to identify the major issues on geospatial information management to be discussed at future sessions of the Committee of Experts, and particularly to develop a programme of work to guide the work of the Committee of Experts during the next five years.

B. Second session of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

12. The Statistics Division has initiated the preparations for the organization of the second session of the Committee of Experts, to be held in New York from 13 to 15 August 2012. The Committee will, inter alia, review its rules of procedure, adopt its future programme of work and discuss a follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

[5] Available from http://ggim.un.org/.

C. Second High-level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management

13. The second High-level Forum on Global Geospatial Information Management will be held in Doha in early 2013. It will again function as an open forum that brings together Government representatives from all Member States as well as interested stakeholders from national and international organizations to address and discuss critical and cutting-edge issues on geospatial information management.

V. Conclusion

14. The work on global geospatial information management over the past two to three years has confirmed that one of the key challenges is a better integration of geospatial and statistical information as a basis for sound and evidence-based decision-making. There are considerable opportunities provided in that context by the swift development of information and communications technology. It is therefore imperative that the professional statistical community, in partnership with the relevant national authorities in the geospatial information field, remain fully informed and engaged in the further development of national geospatial information capacities and in the corresponding establishment of national spatial data infrastructures. To facilitate dialogue at the global level it is suggested that the Statistical Commission be kept regularly abreast of the work of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management.

Annex

Economic and Social Council decision 2011/24 entitled "Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management"

The Economic and Social Council,

Recalling its decision 2010/240 of 21 July 2010, in which it requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its substantive session of 2011 a report on global geographic information management,

Recalling also Statistical Commission decision 41/110 of 26 February 2010,[1] in which the Commission requested the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat to convene a meeting of an international expert group to address global geographic information management issues, including reviewing the existing mechanisms and exploring the possibility of creating a global forum,

Recalling further the resolution on global geographic information management adopted by the eighteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific,[2] in which the Conference requested the Secretary-General and the Secretariat of the United Nations to initiate discussions and prepare a report, for submission to the Economic and Social Council, on global coordination of geographic information management, including consideration of the possible creation of a United Nations global forum for the exchange of information between countries and other interested parties, and in particular for sharing best practices in legal and policy instruments, institutional management models, technical solutions and standards, interoperability of systems and data, and sharing mechanisms that guarantee easy and timely accessibility of geographic information and services,

Recognizing the importance of integrating cartographic and statistical information, as well as spatial data, with a view to fostering location-based geospatial information, applications and services,

Recognizing also the role of the United Nations in promoting international cooperation on cartography, geographical names and geospatial information, including through the organization of conferences, expert meetings, technical publications, training courses and cooperation projects,

Taking into account the urgent need to take concrete action to strengthen international cooperation in the area of global geospatial information,

1. *Takes note* of the report of the Secretary-General on global geospatial information management[3] and the recommendations contained therein;

2. *Recognizes* the need to promote international cooperation in the field of global geospatial information;

[1] *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2010, Supplement No. 4* (E/2010/24), chap. I, sect. B.

[2] See *Eighteenth United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Asia and the Pacific: Report of the Conference, Bangkok, 26-29 October 2009* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.10.I.2), chap. IV, sect. B.

[3] E/2011/89.

3. *Decides*, in this regard, to establish the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, in accordance with the terms of reference contained in the annex to the present resolution, to be established and administered within existing resources and organized accordingly, and requests the Committee to present to the Economic and Social Council in 2016 a comprehensive review of all aspects of its work and operations, in order to allow Member States to assess its effectiveness;

4. *Encourages* Member States to hold regular high-level, multi-stakeholder discussions on global geospatial information, including through the convening of global forums, with a view to promoting a comprehensive dialogue with all relevant actors and bodies;

5. *Emphasizes* the importance of promoting national, regional and global efforts to foster the exchange of knowledge and expertise, to assist developing countries in building and strengthening national capacities in this field.

47th plenary meeting
27 July 2011

Annex

Terms of reference of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management

Objectives and functions

1. The objectives and functions of the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management will be:

(a) To provide a forum for coordination and dialogue among Member States, and between Member States and relevant international organizations, including the United Nations regional cartographic conferences and their permanent committees on spatial data infrastructures, on enhanced cooperation in the field of global geospatial information;

(b) To propose workplans and guidelines with a view to promoting common principles, policies, methods, mechanisms and standards for the interoperability and interchangeability of geospatial data and services;

(c) To provide a platform for the development of effective strategies on how to build and strengthen national capacity concerning geospatial information, especially in developing countries, and, in this regard, to assist interested countries in developing the full potential of geospatial information and the underlying technology;

(d) To compile and disseminate best practices and experiences of national, regional and international bodies on geospatial information related, inter alia, to legal instruments, management models and technical standards, thus contributing to the establishment of spatial data infrastructures, while allowing for flexibility in the development of national geospatial activities;

(e) In performing its functions, the Committee should build upon and make use of the existing work of other forums and mechanisms in the related field.

Membership, composition and terms of office

2. The Committee will comprise experts from all Member States, as well as experts from international organizations, as observers. In appointing their national representatives, Member States will seek to designate experts with specific knowledge drawn from the interrelated fields of surveying, geography, cartography and mapping, remote sensing, land/sea and geographic information systems and environmental protection.

3. The Committee will elect two co-Chairs during each session from among its members, respecting geographical balance and representation.

4. The Committee may establish, as and when needed, informal working groups or subcommittees to deal with specific issues related to its work programme.

Reporting procedure

5. The Committee will report to the Economic and Social Council.

Frequency of meetings

6. The Committee will normally meet once a year and may hold, under exceptional circumstances, additional meetings, as appropriate.

Secretariat

7. The Committee will be supported by the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Cartographic Section of the Department of Field Support.

Meeting documentation

8. Meeting documentation will include an agenda, the previous report of the Committee, thematic notes prepared by working groups or subcommittees, notes by the Secretariat and other relevant documents prepared by external experts or expert groups.